



# DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

## INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release SATURDAY, AUGUST 30, 1941

### MOURNING DOVE, POPULAR GAME BIRD, DESCRIBED IN BULLETIN

The mourning dove, one of the popular game birds, is the subject of an interesting bulletin issued by the Alabama Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit, according to the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Arranged in an attractive format, with excellent photographs of both young and adult doves, the bulletin may be obtained free of charge as long as copies are available by writing to the Alabama Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit, c/o Alabama Polytechnic Institute, Auburn, or to the Alabama Department of Conservation, Montgomery, Ala.

The text includes a discussion of the mourning dove's range, courtship and mating, nesting habits, development of young, feeding habits and food, migrations, destructive agencies, and management possibilities. The bulletin was written by George C. Moore and Allen M. Pearson.

The cooperative unit is financially sponsored by the Alabama Polytechnic Institute, the Alabama Department of Conservation, the American Wildlife Institute, and the Fish and Wildlife Service.

The mourning dove, sometimes called turtle dove, is the only game bird that breeds in every State in the country. The bird is a close relative of the now extinct passenger pigeon.

Serious studies of the status of the mourning dove were instituted a few years ago when the population began to dwindle rapidly. Overshooting, particularly late in summer and early in fall, when most of the birds are nesting, reduced the dove populations until the species was in a precarious condition.

Breeding records of 956 adult doves studied by Moore and Pearson showed that some birds mated as early as December and others as late as September 30. The height of the breeding season, however, was between the middle of March and the first of September.

Doves mature rapidly. Members of the Alabama Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit placed a female hatched in spring with an adult male, and two eggs were produced in August.

"Doves often complete three successful broods," the authors state, "and possibly as many more unsuccessful ones are also attempted during the long season."

Typical nests sites may be found in trees along the edges of fields, pastures, or other clearings. Nests are seldom located in densely wooded areas. Two eggs are usually laid. Incubation begins with the laying of the first egg, and both parents sit on the nest. Eggs hatch in 14 days. Newly hatched nestlings are weak, but the birds develop rapidly.

Feeding begins a few hours after birth. The first food received by the nestlings is composed mainly of "pigeon's milk," a highly specialized food, the composition and origin of which is not fully known. "Pigeon's milk" is produced by both parents and is apparently present only at hatching time and for a few days thereafter.

At 10 or 12 days, the young leave the nest and learn to find food. About a week later the parents leave the young to fend for themselves. Unique in the feeding habits of the dove is its manner of drinking. Most birds fill their bill with

water and then tilt the head upward. The dove, however, keeps its beak in the water until drinking is completed, taking the desired quantity in a single draught much as a horse does.

Contrary to popular opinion, doves are not as swift in flight as some other birds and do not fly long distances even in migration. Most reliable observations indicate the birds seldom if ever exceed 40 miles a hour and migrate in easy relays averaging 20 to 30 miles a day.

- C -